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RUEHTRO
DE RUEHRB #0993/01 2891838
ZNR UUUUU ZZH
P 151838Z OCT 08
FM AMEMBASSY RABAT
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 9236
INFO RUCNISL/ISLAMIC COLLECTIVE PRIORITY
RUCNMGH/MAGHREB COLLECTIVE PRIORITY

UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 03 RABAT 000993

SIPDIS

STATE FOR NEA/MAG, NEA/PD, IIP, ECA, DRL/NESCA AND DRL/IRF

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [PHUM](#) [KISL](#) [KIRF](#) [KPAO](#) [OIIP](#) [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [SCUL](#) [MO](#)

SUBJECT: MISSION MOROCCO MOBILIZED FOR RAMADAN OUTREACH
ACTIVITIES

¶1. (SBU) Summary: American and locally employed staff from all sections of Embassy Rabat and Consulate General Morocco mobilized to make the Mission's Iftars (Ramadan dinners) and extensive outreach programming during the Islamic holy month of Ramadan a success. The Embassy and Consulate General hosted eight Iftars, in an effort to establish new ties in the Muslim community and strengthen dialogue with previous contacts, including USG-funded program participants and international visitor alumni. Events included the Ambassador and Mrs. Riley's Iftars for orphan and at-risk youth, as well as DCM, CG, POL and PAS events engaging political, civil society, business, religious and youth leaders from around the country. Participation by renowned Moroccan singers, television personalities and a former Olympian enhanced the programming, with some events garnering national print and broadcast coverage. End summary.

YOUTH OUTREACH

¶2. (SBU) Ambassador and Mrs. Riley organized a week of Iftars aimed at reaching out to orphaned and at-risk youth in Rabat and surrounding communities. Volunteers from all sections of the embassy participated in Iftars at the Temara Youth Center, Sale Orphanage, Tazi Palace and Akkari Orphanage. Programs included guest presenters, music and distribution of U.S. private and government donated clothing and books. The events, which reached over 450 youths, highlighted Embassy Rabat's engagement with the local community and spirit of volunteerism.

¶3. (SBU) On September 15, Ambassador and Mrs. Riley hosted an Iftar at the Temara Youth Center. Approximately 17 youth attended, as well as a number of the center's staff, Governor of Skhirat-Temara Haoudi Abdelhak, and 20 local officials and parliamentarians. Ambassador and Mrs. Riley handed out soccer uniforms and clothing donated by American companies and American candy to the youth center participants. The Governor also donated soccer uniforms. Highlights of the night included performances by traditional Moroccan musicians, dancing, a &beat-boxing8 performance by one of the center's youth and a guest appearance by rising Moroccan star and singer Nabila Maan.

¶4. (SBU) On September 18, approximately 150 boys and girls attended an Iftar dinner at Sale Orphanage, hosted by Ambassador and Mrs. Riley. Arabic and English language books from PAS, as well as soccer uniforms, were donated to the orphans.

¶5. (SBU) The following evening, September 19, Ambassador and Mrs. Riley hosted an Iftar at the historic Tazi Palace in Rabat for approximately 150 girls from the Al Mouassat and Ichraq orphanages. Arabic and English language books from PAS, as well as soccer uniforms, were donated to the orphans.

Nationally renowned Moroccan television personality and chef Choumicha - referred to as the &Martha Stewart of Morocco8 - attended the event. Pro-palace French language daily newspaper Le Matin (circulation: 22,800) and semi-private Moroccan television station 2M (estimated viewership: 21 million) reported on the event. 2M interviewed Ambassador Riley, who said that hosting Iftars for orphans has become a tradition for him and that it was a pleasure to share the sacred month of Ramadan with the children. This highlighted American respect for Islam with a large Moroccan audience.

¶6. (SBU) Rounding out the week, Ambassador and Mrs. Riley hosted an Iftar for 140 girls at the Akkari orphanage, with former Moroccan female Olympic runner Nezha Bidouane participating and encouraging the girls to pursue their dreams.

¶7. (SBU) On September 25, DCM Jackson hosted an Iftar uniting talented Moroccan students, youth leaders and young professionals)- many of them USG English language and exchange program alumni -- in a social setting, allowing for an exchange of ideas and stories related to cross-cultural exchange. A performance of traditional Andalucian songs by young Tetouan musicians, including a guest performance by an American embassy intern, was well received as a display of respect for Moroccan culture and American-Moroccan collaboration. Each attendee received the IIP-produced Ramadan calendar. The up and coming invitees will likely become Morocco,s future community leaders and academics, and the opportunity for informal dialogue and expression of multicultural respect helped promote favorable attitudes toward the United States, with an anticipated multiplier effect as the invitees share their experiences with their

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communities.

STRENGTHENING RELATIONSHIPS

¶8. (SBU) On September 22, CG Millard hosted Consulate General Casablanca,s annual post-Iftar music program. The guests were leading local politicians and business leaders, including Minister of Social Affairs Nouzha Skalli, Deputy Governor of Greater Casablanca Mouad Jamaai, Governor of Ain Chock Fouzia Amnassar, Head of the U.S.-Morocco Business Council Abdelmalek Kettani, and the local heads of Price Waterhouse Coopers and Citibank. The DCM, as well as POL, ECON, PAS and RAO section heads were present, as were several U.S. ConGen Casablanca employees. The performers, who included some of Morocco,s leading musicians, offered up a variety of local entertainment, including medieval Muslim chants, Amazigh Berber music, old Moroccan Sephardic tunes and Andalucian lute music. The musical performers were enthusiastically received by the spectators, with members of the audience singing along to some of the most popular tunes. Exhibitions of contemporary art and calligraphy, contributed by five local artists, were mounted on the patio to accompany the Ramadan theme. The event succeeded in furthering the Mission,s efforts toward promoting U.S.-Moroccan partnership and enhancing democracy and governance, as well as strengthening relations with the Casablanca business community.

¶9. (SBU) The Political Section in Rabat hosted a September 25 Iftar for female parliamentarians and local politicians. The event focused on both the development of the Mission,s political contacts and the Mission Strategic Plan goal of enhancing democracy and governance. The event reemphasized the mission,s support for female leaders in Morocco and complemented cross-sectional U.S. election-related programming with MEPI and PAS. Several of the invitees previously participated in a PAS-organized U.S. elections DVC in September with U.S. political pundits and the majority of attendees will be taking part in a USG-funded trip to the

United States to observe the November elections and learn about democracy in the United States. Attendees from PAS, USAID and a local NGO also contributed to the dialogue. Participants expressed excitement about their imminent travel to the United States and voiced overwhelming support for Obama,s candidacy, reflecting a broader Moroccan trend in relation to the U.S. elections. They also shared their anticipation that a greater number of female candidates will be included on party lists in the 2009 Moroccan municipal elections.

CIVIL SOCIETY AND COMMUNITY LEADERS

¶10. (SBU) On September 25, CG Millard hosted the consulate,s annual Iftar for leaders of NGOs and civil society. Aziz Dada, Governor and Minister of the National Initiative for Human Development (INDH), the lead agency of the Moroccan government responsible for development, attended. Among the other guests were members of Rotary International, NGO representatives and recipients of MEPI and DoD funds aimed at reaching out to underprivileged children and democracy education. Participants traveled far and wide to attend the event, highlighting the scope and reach of the Consulate General,s contacts. In particular, Najat Anwar, the president of an organization fighting child sexual exploitation, flew from Agadir to participate. Many guests expressed their appreciation for the chance to meet with USG representatives and to network with their counterparts.

¶11. (SBU) PAS-Rabat hosted a September 19 Iftar for select International Visitor Leadership Program alumni and key Moroccan and American religious leaders. The International Visitor alumni described their work in Morocco and shared anecdotes about their respective IVLP programs in the U.S., allowing participants to network, learn about each other,s experience and gain a more in-depth understanding of social, cultural and religious life in America. Invited IIP speaker, Imam Yahya Blankinship addressed the group and provided an educational opportunity for Moroccan guests to learn about Islam in America. Both Imam Blankinship and the IVLP alumni emphasized the importance of educational and cultural exchanges in dispelling negative stereotypes, promoting cultural understanding and reinforcing shared values and commonalities. Each attendee received the IIP-produced Ramadan calendar. The event furthered efforts to maintain and strengthen relations with former IVLP alumni.

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¶12. (SBU) Comment: All of the mission,s Ramadan outreach activities advanced the mission,s public diplomacy strategy to improve public attitudes toward the U.S. and advance international understanding, as well as promote democracy and governance and U.S-Moroccan partnership. In addition, they provided an opportunity for cultural exchange and networking between Moroccan youth, community, academic, governmental, business, media and religious leaders and succeeded in strengthening key contacts across the various sectors of Moroccan society. End comment.

Visit Embassy Rabat's Classified Website;
<http://www.state.sgov.gov/p/nea/rabat>

Riley